

# EL CLARIN

ASPIRA Inc. of New Jersey  
Update

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## MATH & SCIENCE ACADEMY: A SMASHING SUCCESS

Thirty children, ages 10 to 14, participated in the first ever summer session of the Math and Science Academy (MAS).

With the help, technical support and coordination of the Newark Public Schools, the academy took place at the Rafael Hernandez School in Newark. The selected students enjoyed technical instruction, participation in science projects, site visitations to the Panasonic Lab and Liberty Science Center and Career Day presentations by scientists and engineers.



Above: AmeriCorps Member, Teresta Montero is assisting a MAS student, Crystal Izquierdo in Science.

"I am looking forward to the challenges of the academic year and the follow-up after school tutorial program which we will provide for these children," commented Migdala Rodriguez, MAS Coordinator. Next year, the summer session will be conducted at either Rutgers University or NJIT or at both institutions.

MAS is funded in Newark by the MCJ Foundation, The Carnegie Foundation, the United Way of Essex and West Hudson, and Fleet Bank.

For further information, contact Migdala Rodriguez at (973) 484-7554.

## *The ASPIRA Movement: 37 Years of Helping Young People*

It all began in 1961, in New York City, when a group of Hispanic educators saw the need to alleviate the alarming dropout rate among Puerto Ricans in the state. Under the leadership of Dr. Antonia Pantoja, ASPIRA was formed to encourage and promote education and leadership development among Latino youth. It was patterned after her belief that the development of people, singularly or in groups, must be done holistically. Initially a project under the Puerto Rican-Hispanic Forum, ASPIRA became its own organization by 1965.

Today ASPIRA organizations, known as Associates, exist in New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Florida and Connecticut. All of these Associates form the ASPIRA Association which is based in Washington, D.C. ASPIRA of Connecticut is the 'youngest' member of the group having recently been incorporated a few years ago.

Although each ASPIRA is financially independent, and each has its own Board of Directors, the National Office in Washington provides support to each of the members. The National Director is Ronald Blackburn-Moreno and the National Board is made up by representatives from each of the Associates.

This year we celebrate the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ASPIRA movement. ASPIRA of New Jersey became a proud member of this movement in 1968. We are celebrating our 30<sup>th</sup> year!

## NEW FUNDING FOR MAS IN CAMDEN AND TRENTON

ASPIRA has been selected to receive a \$55,000 grant over two years from the William Penn Foundation to implement the Math and Science Academy concept at the Pyno Poynt Family School in Camden.

MAS in Camden will serve 50 children at the middle school level, with special emphasis on the recruitment of female students to prepare for careers in science and math related occupations.

In addition to the Penn Foundation funds, ASPIRA has received approval for a \$25,000 grant from the City of Camden's CDBG allocation to support our counseling efforts for MAS in Camden. ASPIRA is also expecting financial support from the Camden Public Schools to supplement this funding.

In Trenton, the Panasonic Foundation, through our National office, has extended a grant of \$15,000 to establish the MAS project at one of the middle schools. As in Camden, it is expected that these funds be used as a catalyst to obtain more financial support for this superb initiative.

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## 134 PARENTS GRADUATE FROM THE APEX PROGRAM IN JERSEY CITY

One hundred and thirty-four parents completed all 10 APEX workshops and graduated from the program this past June 30<sup>th</sup>. We reproduced in its entirety the article "Being A Better Latino Parent" as it appeared on July 28, 1998 in *The Jersey Journal*.

### Being a better Latino parent

By Isis Fernandez  
Special from El Nuevo Herald

More than a hundred Hispanic parents-turned-students graduated last month from the ASPIRA Parents for Educational Excellence program—APEX for short.

The 10-workshop APEX program run by the Jersey City office of ASPIRA, a Hispanic advocacy group, was created to help parents develop an open line of communication with their children and to help Latino parents overcome the language barrier that can sometimes limit their involvement in their kids' education.

Angelica Morado is a mother of two and a graduate of the program who was proud to have completed the program and was looking forward to reaping the benefits.

"The classes offered in the APEX program have taught me how to defend my rights and how to help my 7-year-old daughter by involving my understanding of her," Morado said. Morado was one of 126 mothers and six fathers in Jersey City's first graduating class. Until now, the program has been offered by the organization's Newark office.



ANGELA PLASENCIA gets hugs from niece Shafie Socorro 7, and daughter Cinda 8, after she was awarded her certificate as an APEX graduate during ceremonies at New Jersey City University.

Parents attended 10 workshops that addressed topics ranging from how to improve their self-esteem to how to get involved in their children's academic career.

Aspira Executive Director William Colon stressed the importance of caring for children and the need for parent-child interaction.

"We need to take greater care of our children. It's necessary to get past the job of parenting and the family with programs like these," Colon said.

Only the third class of graduates from the fledgling program, the graduation brought together children and parents to celebrate a job well done. Dolara and Marcia Moran, students at Jersey City's School 3, were happy and proud to see their mother, Delmy Moran, complete the program.

"I am happy with myself and my life," she said, explaining that the classes have given her a better understanding of her daughters and helped her develop a parental support network of friends.

Journal staff writer Alberto Canal contributed to this report.

### AWARDS NIGHT:

#### A Special Ceremony and a Commitment to High Moral Values

The ASPIRA Awards Night Ceremony took place at the Masonic Lodge in Trenton on June 11<sup>th</sup>. The keynote speaker was the Honorable Noemi Velázquez former Chairperson of the ASPIRA Board of Directors. ASPIRA traditionally holds its Awards Night Ceremony at the end of each academic year to honor students who have achieved academic excellence, and demonstrated leadership and a commitment to their community. The evening culminates with the special ceremony of "El Areyto," in which ASPIRA student leaders are initiated.

The "Areyto" name comes from a Taino Indian ceremony where tribal leaders sang of the great deeds of their heroes. During the ceremony, students promise to uphold the values of ASPIRA, no matter what hard work and sacrifices it will require of them, by affirming the "Areyto" oath.

The oath is taken by candle light, with the "Aspirante of the Year" leading and the rest of the group repeating. It is a very emotional and fraternal experience for these youngsters. For many, it is the first time they receive such honor and recognition for academic achievement and leadership. For those who are seniors, it is their last ASPIRA activity before heading to college or work.

At the end of the ceremony, the students blow out their candles, yell out cheers and applaud. Some hug and some cry. And, they all beam with pride!

The recipient of the "Aspirante of the Year" Award was Joselito Gracia. Congratulations on a job well done!

### "EL AREYTO"

"I do solemnly affirm that I will uphold the ideals of ASPIRA which are:

peace within humanity,  
the defense of rights and  
prerogatives of the culture  
for the benefits of all,  
the motivation of studies and efforts,  
dedication to the task of stimulating,  
within myself and others  
excellence in the fields of  
sciences, arts and professions,  
for the services of our community  
in New Jersey and wherever  
we may find ourselves.

I close these words with the joy  
and lucidity of this light  
which symbolically represents for me  
the joy and clarity of intelligence.

As I blow out my candle,  
I incorporate to my spirit  
the light of this flame  
which will burn in my heart, forever,  
and will never die,  
as long as I live,

flame of knowledge that I will use wisely  
with dignity and authority."

speaker: "Do you accept this oath?"

Aspirantes: "Yes, we accept it!"  
(blow out your candles)

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**UNITED WAY OF MERCER COUNTY  
FUNDS APEX PROGRAM AT TRENTON CENTER**

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ASPIRA's campaign to expand the ASPIRA Parents for Educational Excellence (APEX) Program to all major urban school districts got a major boost when the United Way of Mercer County funded the program to expand its services to the Trenton school district.

The grant \$20,000 over two years, will be used to "leverage" funding from other sources to include corporate contributors and foundation friends.

APEX has been a major success in reaching out to hundreds of Latino parents and training them in parental involvement techniques in Newark and Jersey City.(Please see related story).

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**How Parents Can Help Their Children Succeed in School**

As the summer wanes, children and parents look ahead with excitement to the start of the new school year. Parents can play a critical role in their children's school success. The National Association of Elementary School Principals and World Book Educational Products conducted a survey of nearly 10,000 elementary and middle school principals which confirmed that everyday home activities can have a dramatic impact on how well children do in school. Here's what the principals suggest to parents as the most important ways in which they can help their children learn:

- Listen and talk with your children, paying consistent attention to questions and feelings. Ask "What do you think?" or "What's wrong?" Let children know their feelings are important. Workout problems together.
- Show pride in your children's academic growth and accomplishments.
- Regularly encourage children with their school work and help them with homework when needed.
- Instill a strong work ethic in children by establishing good family work habits. Help children perceive themselves as capable problem solvers.
- Give priority to schoolwork, reading and other academic activities over non-academic endeavors like television, music, videos and recreation.
- Emphasize regular, planned use of time in the home for studying, playing, eating meals, and bedtime.
- Read aloud to your children, and have them read to you.
- Make a trip to the local library a weekly routine, and make frequent use of books, newspapers and periodicals.
- Set standards and expectations for your children.
- Get to know your children's current schoolwork and school activities.
- Encourage regular discussions with your children and find opportunities to enlarge vocabulary and sentence patterns.
- Get to know your children's academic strengths and weaknesses.
- Make structure, routine and punctuality priorities for activities at home.
- Have a quiet place for your children to study at home, with appropriate reference materials, such as an encyclopedia and dictionary, available for use.

ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey concurs with these suggestions. The agency has always encouraged parents' active involvement in the education of their children.

Four years ago, the organization established the ASPIRA Parents for Educational Excellence (APEX) Program, designed to help Latino parents become involved in the education of their children at home, in schools and school activities; and in support of school and education reform. The APEX Program consists of two basic components: the APEX Workshop Series which is a formal training program; and one-on-one assistance to parents who train other parents.

The APEX Workshop Series consists of ten workshops which address such topics as helping children improve their study habits, communication skills for the home, parents' rights in the schools, group dynamics, improving the self esteem, understanding school structure, and leadership skills. APEX uses a "trainer-of-trainer" model in which parents trained through the APEX workshops identify and train other parents in the community.

With the increased awareness of educational issues and support offered through the APEX Programs, parents have a base from which together help their children at home, increase their participation in school activities and advocate for their children and their community's education.

The APEX Program, which is free of charge to interested parents, is currently offered in Newark and Jersey City. We plan to shortly implement the program in Paterson, Camden, and Trenton. For additional information, please contact Ms. Marcia Cagues, APEX Manager at (973) 484-7554.

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ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey is a nonprofit organization providing counseling and leadership development programs to Latino and other minority youth. Our programs include personal and educational counseling, dropout prevention, leadership development and post-secondary placement.

EL CLARIN is an ASPIRA publication, designed to inform the community of our programs and other issues of importance. For more information on ASPIRA or to receive EL CLARIN you can write or call our executive office:

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Office Hours: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
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## FIRST UNION BANK GRANTS \$10,000 FROM VAN HOUTEN TRUST FUND TO SUPPORT ASPIRA'S PROGRAMS



Mr. Anibal Ramos, Jr., Chairperson of the Board of Directors (left) and Mr. William Colon, Executive Director (right) accept the check for \$10,000 from Ms. Gail Cass, First Union (center)

## ASPIRA APEX GRADUATION HELD AT



NEW JERSEY CITY UNIVERSITY, JUNE 30, 1998

Our Web Page: [www.aspira.org/NewJersey.htm](http://www.aspira.org/NewJersey.htm)

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